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CORRESPONDENCE.

Letter from Italy.

PRATOLINO, Dec. 17th, 1881.

Messrs. Editors.—Travellers pass by the route of Bologna, only a short distance from Pratolino, without the least suspicion that the forest which they behold contains a royal mansion—for not a single avenue announces it. The preceding idea of him who constructed

The Palace of Pratolino

seems to have been to form an abode of mystery. A single narrow, unequal way leads to a square in the centre of the park where the house is situated, in such a manner as not to be seen until you arrive before it. This vast court is surrounded by a railing supported and united by pilasters of the rustic Tuscan order. On the left side in front of the palace, and beyond the trellis work, there is a large tract of ground covered with trees, at the extremity of which the genius of John of Bologna placed the Colossus of the Apennines, in reality a statue of Jupiter Pluvialis, of grand style, majestic head, bushy temples braving the tempest and covered with hoar frost. His hair descends like icicles upon his large shoulders, and the locks of his beard resemble stalactites. In order to add to the extraordinary effect of this Colossus a sort of crown is placed on his head formed of small jets d'eau, which fall upon his shoulders and rolling over the whole figure make it sparkle in the rays of the sun. A view of this statue justifies the claim for John of Bologna that he was a worthy rival of the great Michael Angelo.

Erected in the 16th century under the direction of one of the Medici, the Villa Real di Pratolino united all the grandeur, beauty, riches, and ingenuity which that remarkable age could furnish. Francesco, son of Cosmo de Medici, it was, who transformed this savage, rough spot on the side of Mt. Morello, into a secret asylum of beauty, consecrated it to mystery and silence, and shrouded within it that Bianco Capello, whose singular history presents a striking example of the vicissitudes and reverses of fortune. The hand of nature had prepared the elements, that of the artist had only to reduce them to symmetry. The forests which covered the ground needed only the axe in certain parts, or to be formed, in others, into avenues. The thick tufts of trees pierced by winding paths, were transformed into inextricable labyrinths. On all sides fountains sparkled up, whose waters were collected in vast basins, or fell in cascades, carrying along into every part the freshness and gentle murmur of their motion. The woods, composed of firs, laurels, and evergreens, seemed the asylum of perpetual spring. The pleasures of the chase and angling were provided for in the park stocked with wild animals, and the waters with fish of every species. The experienced gardeners transplanted thither the rarest trees and flowers, and brought to perfection the fruits of all nations. In short, this retreat called to mind the delicious abodes which the voluptuous Emperors of Rome retired to in pursuance of the counsels of Epicurus to lay down the purple and crown themselves with the roses of pleasure. In this vast enclosure, fenced in with forests as by an impenetrable curtain, the Tuscan sovereign forgot fame in the lap of pleasure. The seductive Bianco Capello was the queen of these solitudes; frequently armed with the symbols of Diana, and surrounded like her with nymphs, she traversed the woods to the sounds of horns; more frequently, however, she wandered through these paths with her lover, consecrating them with monuments, alas! more durable than their happiness.

A person must have resided in Italy, or in some torrid climate, to appreciate the delight which the shade, the murmur, and the flowing of waters can procure. To an Italian, the sweetest element in John's delineation of paradise is the "voice of many waters." The aphorism of Rousseau, which at first appears like a paradox, is founded in the strictest

truth, that cold is best preserved in hot countries. The narrow streets cheat the sun out of his ingress, and the houses defy the fervors of summer. The walls are very thick, the windows few and narrow. Every advantage is taken of a current of air when it can be procured—living waters distribute a reviving freshness by their moist evaporations, and as a last combination of all that is cool, they imitate nature in the formation of artificial grottoes.

The Grottoes of Pratolino

are acknowledged to be splendid specimens of their kind—perhaps the most worthy of examination in Italy. They are all of them vaulted, and rest on beautiful columns of marble. The walls and the roofs are ornamented with stalactites, madrepores, marine plants, corals, shells, and mother-of-pearl, and all these objects are mingled with paintings in mosaic. Statues of marble and bronze cast their streams into basins of marble or gilded lead—and these in turn empty into secret passages beneath the pavement, the waters which finally escape into the open gardens only to be again applied to a thousand different purposes. It is well to remember, before entering these grottoes, that every sort of surprise, and all sorts of deceit are here prepared to entrap the curious. Sometimes the commodious seats which invite them to repose themselves, break with their weight and duck them in an unexpected bath—here, a ladder is placed as if leading to some curious object, but scarcely have you placed one foot on the step before a catch goes off and unmasks a fountain which rushes direct in your face—there, when you least expect it, a marine monster or some other strange figure rises, rolls its eyes on you, opens its mouth, and covers you with a flood of water. This is one place in Europe where it is superior wisdom to submit meekly to the infliction of a guide.

The Grotto of the Deluge is the first the stranger arrives at, so called from the quantity of water which flows in it, not only from the ceiling but from the walls, and even from the pavement. When you enter it you are completely at the mercy of the fountain-players, who can inundate you without the possibility of your avoiding it, for the fountains bar the passage, and can even reach you on the esplanade—the pavement of which, constructed of small round stones of various colors, and arranged so as to imitate mosaic work, is pierced by innumerable holes, through which a multitude of little fountains may spout upon you. In a colder climate this sort of amusement would prove somewhat inconvenient. It is, however, foreseen—no one is exposed to it against his will, and it may be avoided by proper precautions.

The Grotto of the Samaritan is famous for the curious and numerous mechanical inventions of Buontalenti. Several complicated movements successively take place. The cave represents a hamlet composed of huts intermingled with trees. The door of a house opens and a beautiful village girl comes forth carrying a vase, and approaches one of the fountains to draw water. Her movements are very natural, and her body possesses a kind of suppleness and grace. Arriving at the fountain, and having filled her vase with water, she places it again on her head, and turns toward the cottage; not, however, without frequently turning round her head to gaze at a shepherd seated near, who attempts to prevail on her to stay and listen to his music. On the other side a blacksmith opens his shop and is seen busily engaged with two workmen in the labors of the forge; a miller also carries sacks of grain to a mill, the mechanism of which is most complete. In the distance is heard the sound of horns and the barking of dogs, and we are entertained with the representation of a hunt—many wild animals run across the bottom of the scene pursued by hounds and hunters. In the foreground, birds, perched in the branches, pour forth their song—and swans and ducks are seen sporting in the waters. These and other mechanical inventions are certainly astonishing when we consider the period (1569) when they were executed.

The Grotto Della Stufa or of the Bath is small, but ornamented very carefully with madrepores and corals, from which an exceedingly fine rain escapes, or rather a tepid mist, which sinks into the bosom of the bath. This basin occupies the centre of the grotto—it is of red marble, and is supplied at will from two satyrs of bronze. In the construction of these grottoes all the resources of art are apparently exhausted to obviate the attacks of heat. Here a new temperature is created, comparable indeed with that of the gardens of Armida, the delusions of which were probably intended to be realized here; unless indeed Tasso himself has copied the gardens of Pratolino. The grotto of Cupid, the fountain of Esculapius, the urns, the tombs, and the statues which people these woods, all attest the respect of the Medici for the monuments of art and antiquity. Here rises Mount Parnassus with the statues of Apollo and

the Muses—there Pegasus is bounding from the summit of the hill, whence also a limped stream starts. That temple of elegant architecture is consecrated to the graces! This rude grotto covered with moss, forms a shelter from the storm—to such a cave Dido and Aeneas retreated. A ray of light piercing the rocky ceiling enables us to distinguish the verses of Virgil carved on the marble.

Over this magnificent royal retreat, however, hangs the pall of a crime which terminated at once the existence of Francesco Medici and his beautiful wife.—Those who love the marvellous have collected a thousand fables on the subject, but the problem remains unsolved.—Whatever the facts may have been, it is known that the Cardinal de Medici had always been the enemy of Bianca Capello, the lovely Venetian, and that he never pardoned her brother for the mesalliance. A story is indeed told that the Grand Duchess prepared a pastry poison with which she resolved to avenge herself upon the Cardinal. The Grand Duke, however, returning hungry from the chase, unluckily found and ate a large quantity of this deadly preparation. Bianca, desperate at the idea of having poisoned her husband, resolved to share his fate, and the poison taking effect in both instances, they died in inexpressible tortures, without the cardinal permitting any one, as it is said, to afford them succor, which circumstance has made him pass as the author of this calamity. The latter is probably nearer the truth of the matter.

Thus the sun of the Medicean glory went down forever in the reddened glare of murder. Luxury had given birth to a splendid progeny of art, but like Saturn, ended by devouring her offspring. The sale-room, or the sovereign's pleasure, no longer furnished inspiration sufficient to feed the artist-genius. Francesco could display to inquisitive guests the palace of Pratolino, and boast of the sums expended on its art, but the splendid light which had illumined Europe began now to fade in the dearth of aliment. The school of Raphael was dispersed—the death of Michael Angelo had left a void which it was impossible to fill. The arts still flourished, but it was only in appearance. No want of ready and ingenious talent, but gallantly and pleasure alone inspired the hand of the artist—and the master-age was past.

Pratolino is a monument of this period of Tuscan decadence. Utterly neglected, it is now a melancholy spectacle. The vast apartments, the long galleries formerly ornamented with pictures and rich hangings, now only display the nakedness of uncovered walls. The mosaic pavements are covered with dust, and the wind sobs through the broken casements. In the garden-walks briars are growing, and sometimes the path is choked with the branches of some great pine which has been struck by lightning. The walls are crumbling away, and in the midst of the disjointed statues parasitic plants spring up and fasten their clasping fingers, covering them with a sombre verdure. The virgin vine climbing round the columns mingles its tight garlands with the arabesque ornaments which run along the friezes, and which are imitations of this natural decoration. Mosses and lichen are covering down out of sight what man appears to have been forced to respect. Everywhere art is yielding to nature, having nothing here to oppose her but her own vis inertia.

Such is the history of the Tuscan Palace of Pleasure, and such its termination everywhere and in all human experience. The art which lends itself to mere pleasure becomes palsied with weakness and perishes for lack of any immortal principle within it. The life that gives itself only to pleasure will probably end in a tragedy, and leave naught but a ruin—a great sad memory behind.

L. M. C.

The Sustentation Fund.

An Important Suggestion.

Messrs. Editors.—I send you Dr. Barr's letter by permission. It seems to me to contain the germ of an effort which, if generally made, will prove successful. I hope that our other papers will copy it, and am sure from past experience of their kindness, that our editorial brethren will lend their valuable aid to the carrying out of the proposed plan. It is my purpose to furnish from time to time frequent information in regard to the progress made, and the help of brethren everywhere is earnestly invoked. If a general effort be made to secure at least an average of one dollar per member from all our congregations, and those who are able will give generously, who can doubt that the full amount needed will be raised?

Faithfully yours, RICHARD McILWAIN.

Office of Home Missions, Baltimore, Dec. 23th.

Home Missions.

CHARLESTON, W. VA., Dec. 13, '81. Brother McIlwaine.—Your visit to our churches has, as far as I can learn, awakened a good degree of interest among our people on the subject of Home Missions. The collection in our own congregation, in January, will at least be doubled. The growing wants in our own Presby-

tery gives us a deep interest in the cause. The population along the line of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad has doubled in the last five or six years, and with our present ministerial force we cannot supply one-half of the points with preaching on the Sabbath that are calling for it. We expect to have the new field between Huntington and St. Albans occupied by the first of the year. We will still have about four promising fields, where something more than the half of a minister's support could be raised. Unless we can have an appropriation from the Home Mission Fund to make out the support, we can do nothing for these fields, and they must be lost to us. Yet our wants are trifling compared with the great field of Texas and other wide portions without a living ministry. You ask for \$50,000 at the January collection. But how are you to get it? The church is abundantly able to give that sum, and willing, too, if they could be awakened to a sense of its importance. The majority of our congregations could average a dollar per member if a sufficient interest were awakened, and many individuals could give by the hundreds if they were so disposed.

What would you think of this plan? Let a space be appropriated every week in each of our religious papers to set before the readers the urgent demands of this cause, and to receive and acknowledge any voluntary contributions to Home Missions. Some would be glad to respond to such a call, and their example would influence others. Many of the readers of the Central, by having the subject brought frequently to their attention, would contribute through the editors who might not otherwise give. So with our other papers. Unless some special effort is made, we fear that our missionary fields will fall short again, and our missionary fields be left to suffer.

Fraternally yours, J. C. BARR.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES.

Southern Presbyterian.

Rev. N. M. Woods, of Galveston, Texas, has accepted the call to the Second Presbyterian church at Charlotte, N. C., and will enter upon his work there at once. His post office address is now Charlotte, N. C.

Rev. T. D. Witherspoon, D. D., having declined to accept the Professorship of Church Government and History in Columbia Seminary, to which he was elected some time ago, the Board of Directors will meet on the 17th inst. to elect a professor. The Board has announced that the Seminary will be opened on the 18th September next.

Pastoral Relation Dissolved.—At a called meeting of Chesapeake Presbytery held in Leesburg, Va., on Tuesday, December 27th, the pastoral relation between Rev. Henry Branch and the Catactin church was dissolved at the request of the pastor, the congregation assenting. Mr. Branch has served this congregation with much fidelity and success for more than ten years.

The Texas Presbyterian is much gratified that Dr. Smoot, of Austin, has declined the call to Augusta, Ga. We suppose that all the Presbyterians in Texas sympathize in this feeling.

Rev. Thomas Ward White, Evangelist of North Mississippi Presbytery, has received a unanimous call to the pastorate of the church at Homer, La., for many years the charge of the late Rev. J. T. Davidson.

Rev. E. E. Bigger, who has been acting as stated supply of Alabama Street church, Memphis, Tenn., has accepted a call to the churches of Pine Grove and Walnut Hill, Clark county, Ky. A meeting of Memphis Presbytery was called to be held on the 23d inst. for the purpose of dismissing him to West Lexington Presbytery.

Missionary Teacher to Brazil.—Miss Charlotte Kemper will accompany Mr. and Mrs. Lane, who expect to sail in a few days, on their return to the mission at Campinas, Brazil. Miss Kemper has been connected with the Augusta Female Seminary, Staunton, Va., as one of its most accomplished teachers. She has long desired to engage in the missionary work, but her great usefulness at home led her friends to doubt whether she ought to give up the work for which she was so eminently qualified and in which she was so successful. Her scholarship, her experience as a teacher, and her earnest Christian character, justify the confident expectation of the greatest usefulness in her new work.

Fredericksburg, Va.—The beautiful Christmas tree provided for the Sunday School children at the Memorial chapel of the Presbyterian church took fire from the lighting of the tapers, and was, with most of its contents destroyed. No other injury was done by the fire, and the pastor, Rev. J. P. Smith, promised the children that they should have another and a prettier tree provided for the New Year.

Capon Bridge, W. Va.—Our great Capon Valley and those adjacent are giving evidence of substantial and decided improvement. Our worthy citizen, Rev. J. W. Walkup, in addition to the improvements he has already completed, is now erecting upon the Parsonage grounds at Capon Bridge a neat and comfortable residence, and when completed will make a desirable home, and will add much to the appearance and interest of the Valley. Mr. Walkup has been very energetic in carrying forward these improvements, and shown much taste and judgment which is not only satisfactory but highly gratify-

ing to his friends and all interested in the enterprise.—Romney Intelligencer.

Jonestown, Miss.—Five thousand dollars have been raised for the erection of a house of worship at this place, on the Mobile and Northwestern railroad, and the contract is ready to be placed in the hands of the architect.—Christian Observer.

Rev. J. E. Spilman, D. D.—At an adjourned meeting of the Presbytery of Central Mississippi, held at Vicksburg during the sessions of Synod, the pastoral relation between Rev. J. E. Spilman, D. D., and the Canton church was dissolved.—Ib.

Ashton Church is the name of a new church on Honey Island, recently organized by the Presbytery of Central Mississippi.—Ib.

Rev. W. A. Alexander has resigned the pastoral charge of the church at Lexington, and taken charge of the Yazoo City church.—Ib.

A memorial tablet has been placed in the First Presbyterian church in Augusta, Ga., with this inscription: "In memory of Rev. Robert Irvine, D. D., for over ten years the beloved and faithful pastor of this church. Born in County Down, Ireland, September 15th, 1814; finished his Christian ministry, in the service of this people, April 8th, 1881. 'Blessed is the man that trusted in the Lord.'"

South Carolina.—The Monthly, published at Clinton, S. C., says that Georgetown is the only county in the State without a Presbyterian church. If this be so the State is better provided for in this matter than any other Southern State. There should be an effort made without delay to plant a Presbyterian church in Georgetown.

Bethel Presbytery has organized three churches during the past year and ordained two young men to preach the Gospel. The pastoral relation between Rev. S. L. Wilson and the churches of Ainswell and Horeb has been dissolved by Presbytery. There are at least nine vacant churches in Bethel Presbytery. Rev. F. L. Leeper has declined the call of Presbytery to the evangelistic work.—N. C. Presbyterian.

Winston, in Orange Presbytery.—Rev. F. H. Johnston writes December 26th: At our communion here last Sabbath a week ago, five young persons were received into the church on profession of faith, and one on certificate. Preaching was had daily for a week previous to the meeting and was continued one week after. From twelve to fifteen persons attended the various inquiry meetings.—Ib.

Lexington, in Concord Presbytery.—Rev. A. M. Watson writes on December 19th: God has blessed Lexington with a visit of his gracious Spirit, and we have recently added to our church seven on examination, and others to come in yet. The sister churches also have received as many.—Ib.

Selma, Ala.—A friend writes us: "The First Church of Selma, Ala., Dr. Hooper, pastor, has resolved to raise \$1,000 the next year to send a new missionary to China, with the expectation of making this an annual contribution. The salary of a married man is 900 Mexican or \$800 of U. S. currency. This does not interfere with the \$200 the Sabbath school has always furnished for a school in Soochow. Besides, the ladies expect to furnish \$150 as a minimum, and the 'Busy Bees,' whose smallest amount ever raised was \$250, in the future will work for foreign missions. It is probable this church will give \$1,500 in 1882 to the Baltimore treasury. One subscription was \$156, (\$3 a Sabbath); another \$100. Several gave \$50 each, and many \$25. There seemed to be a great revival in the Church, that is, all were full of love and zeal. Each member was like a stove. Worldliness does not prosper, but family religion flourishes. This result was reached by a committee of the elders and deacons presenting a subscription list to each member of the Church. A pious widow who wished to carry out her husband's wishes gave \$50. As a memorial of their former pastor, the Rev. W. J. Lowry, D. D., the Church propose to the committee to call it 'The Lowry Mission.' They agreed that this should not interfere with other objects.—Southern Presbyterian.

The Evangelistic Committee of the Synod of Kentucky has elected two other evangelists, the Rev. Messrs. J. E. Triplett and A. D. Tadlock, who, with the Rev. Messrs. E. O. Guarrant and W. D. Morton, will enter next week on their work as Synodical evangelists. The following wise resolution was adopted:

"Resolved, That it is the sense of this committee that the evangelists elected by the Synod devote their time chiefly to evangelistic work proper, that is to say, in preaching the gospel to vacant and feeble churches and in organizing churches, if the way be clear, in destitute places; in grouping churches, and in rendering them assistance in securing the stated services of ministers, spending only so much time among the stronger churches, either with or without a pastor, as the weather during the winter or early spring, or other providential circumstances, may make necessary."—Ib.

Northern Presbyterian.

A correspondent in Madison, Wis., says of the departure of the Rev. John E. Wright to assume the charge of the Second Presbyterian church, Chicago: "Mr. Wright has supplied the Madison Presbyterian church nearly five years, and labored faithfully. He has done all that man could do to build up our Zion. We part with him regretfully. Dr. Patton's late people could not have made a better choice."

There were thirteen additions to the West Spruce Street Presbyterian church, Philadelphia, (Rev. Dr. Breed's) on Sabbath, December 18th.

(Continued on 5th page.)